

And the extravagant Lithia Springs Hotel,
Once the tallest building for 700 miles
Between San Francisco and Portland.

But the spa never happened,
The park and renamed hotel
Have faded from former glory,
And in the winter, the plaza is deserted.

But come summer, there are the tourists,
Cowlicked siblings pushing, giggling,
Rattling impatient potato chip bags,
Hesitant parents sharing
Screwed-up faces and babble
As they experience the water:
"Oh, our Aunt Emma swears by this stuff.
We found out last week she doesn't have cancer
And we're all just tickled about that.
Oh Johnny, stop shoving your sister
And get back in the car.
It's time to go."

And if they hurry,
There may be enough time left today
To make still another vacation memory
Somewhere on down the road.

-- Michael Anderson

Ashland OR

ROY

It was the saturday before christmas with the hot black-smiths working overtime, ringing the bells of parrots in the mile high gums. The car climbed round the narrow bitumen and through the rusty tunnels of breadboxes and mail boxes, with the airmail greetings handled three days ago by the cold-handed, blue-faced mail sorters in fox-shouldered London.

I stopped at the CHANNON STORE, the petrol pumper was a quiet farmer and the storekeeper wasn't much more active. He went to fetch the cold beer from out back, I looked around the store and up at the black saddle riding the metal bracket from the wall. It was cheap. For a black saddle it was very cheap. Near the door a motor in a wire cage shook the worn boards and rocked the baby food on the curved shelves. There was a lot of second-hand

stuff about the place, some so old that only a museum would make an offer. Through another door was the post office with the big knobbed stampers and the inky fields of the stamp pads. Also old and yellow blank telegrams, for out here there is no hurry and no emergencies. A lady was banging material from one pile and building a precarious tower with another. Her husband returned with my beer, I paid him and we exchanged the season greetings, the motor turned itself off and our voices blared like a sunday radio. On the veranda I passed a hippie girl with insect bites dotting her legs, I nearly said merry christmas. Seated in the car I tore back the metal fingernail of the can, took a long drink, then secured it between my driving legs. The motor started up again, then a typewriter began from the post office. Like a colony of chickens I thought. The storekeeper came out the door followed by the hippie girl, and began pumping petrol into her ancient holden.

I took the turn that said UPPER TERRANIA CREEK ROAD and was soon traveling through pools of brown dust left by a beat-up old combi van full of hari khrishna.

I found his roadside mail box and drove down the dirt track, across the concrete causeway with its visions of easy flooding, and up the other side to his house. We shook hands and I carried the beer inside, his two kids hung from me like large albino flies and asked me questions of my grown up status. I told them I just bought Australian at an auction.

I first met him about four years ago, we worked for the same bricklayers, the same bastards. For fifteen years Roy had shorn his way through western N.S.W., laid bricks in Sydney, and had a champion boxer named Bimlo Griffin who weighed over seven stone. Now he was up here on the far north coast, living with his family and cattle dogs in the knap of the rain forest. He was considered the unluckiest out of us crowd. If he sold his beef and went into pigs, beef would skyrocket and the arse would fall out of the pig prices. And if it looked a good year for tomatoes the hail would come and smash the yellow-green flowers. And there was the year he came into the pub with bags of beautiful corn, and we bought it and ate it hot with butter. It was too small to market, but we thought it o.k. We all agreed that he would one day win a big lottery, but maybe men like him don't need a lottery, he has survived this long knowing luck is only a snotty nosed little kid. And a win would only be satisfaction rather than a windfall.

We sat talking and drinking the ice beer, he showed me his goldfish that swam lop-sided like a disabled submarine.

It had been like this for six months he said. I suggested the fish may have suffered a stroke, a stroke of bad luck Roy grinned. He said he now rented a few acres of bananas out at Jiggi which explained why he seldom fronted at the hotel. They were doing all right too he reckoned, steep country but safe from the prevailing winds. In the conversation I mentioned following the hari krishnas. They had a commune on the farm next to Roy's and he often saw them in naked circles performing strange rituals and had once fired at their dogs after two of his ducks went missing.

He laughed and told me of how, in the summer, the kids on the school bus would crowd the left side of the bus to see the hippies swimming naked in the creeks. He was a born story teller and a better teller of jokes. He had 'em for any subject, we'd try to fool him by pulling a vague subject from the air and he would always come good even if he had to improvise or ad lib. His other gift was blowing smoke rings. He would never blow them if you asked him, but sometimes sitting in a still building at dinner time, in the semidarkness, he would blow one. A big ring from the center of his mouth and a small one from each side of his lips.

By now evening was coming on the air, he took a Hessian bag and we walked down to the big vegie garden near the poultry run. Working the shovel into the good soil and filling the bag with spuds and other marvels growing in the rich fowl manure. On the way back up to the car he stopped at an old packing shed and showed me the dozen or so sheep living beneath it, all shapes and sizes. The shearer still living in him I wondered? We said goodbye and I drove down the dirty road into the blaring sun, yes, a man with a character like that, you could be forgiven for forgetting that he was born in England.

-- Allan Jurd

Lismore, N.S.W., Australia

ALL WORK & NO PLAY

augusta lived in the center of a circular skyscraper on high density row. she worked across town for a demolition company. augusta was well rounded. though thin. strong. she thought of herself modestly. as a renaissance woman. a modern one. she read brief philosophy. on saturdays. on sundays she merged with nature.